Twitter Thread by David Frum

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You're hearing a lot of talk about "irregularities" in the election of 1876 that led to a "disputed" outcome. What is being referred to in this hazy terms?

Across the state of South Carolina, white conservatives had used terror and massacre to deter former slaves from voting in 1876. Here's the story of an attack upon the small town of Hamburg in July https://t.co/W47UQ5QVuc

Hundreds of black South Carolinians were killed by white conservative militias. Blacks fought back in many places, but they were out-gunned.

The killings were not spontaneous outbursts. They were part of planned campaign of anti-black voter suppression.

https://t.co/92OLBuQij3

Some of the elements of the conservative plan to suppress black votes in South Carolina in 1876 sound queasily familiar in our own time, adjusting for the antique language and technology.

> 13. We must attend every Radical meeting that we hear of whether they meet at night or in the day time. Democrats must go in as large numbers as they can get together, and well armed, behave at first with great courtesy and assure the ignorant Negroes that you mean them no harm and so soon as their leaders or speakers begin to speak and make false statements of facts, tell them then and there to their faces, that they are liars, thieves and rascals, and are only trying to mislead the ignorant Negroes and if you get a chance get upon the platform and address the Negroes.

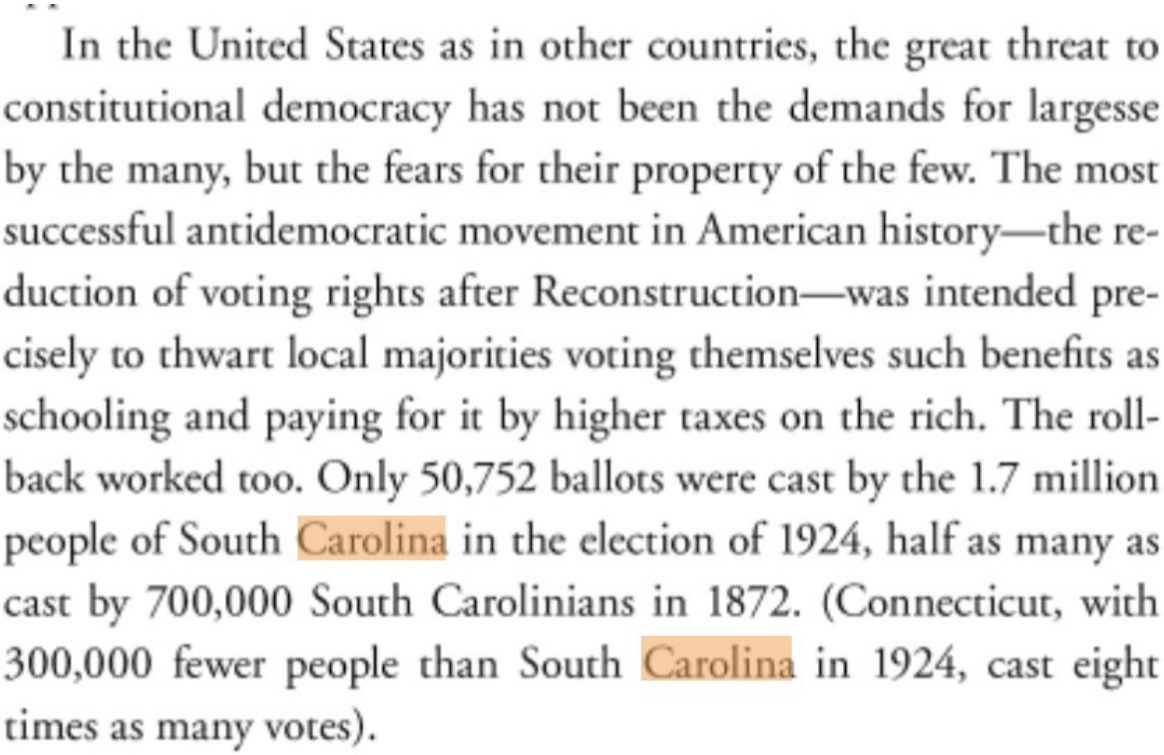
But back of it all was terror and violence, more violence than could be contained by the limited federal forces in the area - who were anyway constrained by the white conservative Democratic House majority elected in 1874.

The terror and violence worked. States where large black populations had formerly cast ballots were "redeemed" for the conservative cause - and for the presidential nominee of the racial conservatives, the Democrat, Samuel Tilden.

In the face of this campaign of terrorism, the two national parties struck a deal. The Republicans would accept the validity of white conservative voter suppression at the state level - if they could retain the presidency and its patronage. The bargain was made.

When modern senators propose to repeat 1876, they are not endorsing some Solomonic compromise. They are endorsing a negotiated concession to violent conservative minorities.

Over the next half century, the states "redeemed" by white conservatives shriveled into tight oligarchies. I described the process in my book Trumpocracy, p. 141



In the United States as in other countries, the great threat to constitutional democracy has not been the demands for largesse by the many, but the fears for their property of the few. The most successful antidemocratic movement in American history—the reduction of voting rights after Reconstruction—was intended precisely to thwart local majorities voting themselves such benefits as schooling and paying for it by higher taxes on the rich. The rollback worked too. Only 50,752 ballots were cast by the 1.7 million people of South Carolina in the election of 1924, half as many as cast by 700,000 South Carolinians in 1872. (Connecticut, with 300,000 fewer people than South Carolina in 1924, cast eight times as many votes).

Democracy in the United States has a contested history. It's being contested again right now. The foundational idea of democracy is that each person counts. Let's commit to proving that theory true in the dangerous week ahead. END.